

Globally Engaged, Locally Active: A Curriculum for Intercultural Competence

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The author examines ways in which considerations for global communities exist within home-based universities and spotlights the State University of New York at Buffalo as it recently developed the new 'global engagement' category within its intellectual foundations program.

Introduction

One of the fundamental purposes of higher education is to help students acquire the skills and disposition to function as globally-informed citizens. In the past, efforts to educate for global citizenship have often been linked to study abroad opportunities that are effective for some, but which lack the numerical strength to effect significant change. Indeed, according to the Institute of International Education's Open Doors report (2013), only about 1.5 percent of American students travel abroad for studies and many of these engage in short-term programs that offer just a few days or weeks out of the country. The areas in which campus must improve efforts to internationalize curricular and co-curricular activities are not only vast, but also recognized by campus leaders. In fact, findings from the Center for Internationalization and Global Engagement's (CIGE) 2011 survey on campus internationalization suggest that institutions have become aware of both the limits of study abroad and the need for campus-based initiatives that improve global competencies. Indeed, the report suggests that three areas, including (1) internationalizing the curriculum at the home campus, (2) developing strategic partnerships with overseas institutions, governments, and corporations, and finally, (3) expanding international student and staff recruitment have garnered the most attention and resources in recent years (American Council on Education, 2012).

Significantly among these initiatives is a newfound focus on curriculum, especially within the general education core. Generally speaking, institutions strive for a well-formed and integrated approach to providing international perspectives within general education programs. And indeed, the report suggests that more than 55 percent of institutions reported initiatives to

include global perspectives in the general education sequence. Yet, the importance of this number is muted by the suggestion that only 28 percent currently have high-quality courses and programs in place (American Council on Education, 2012). Encouraging as it might be that institutions are actively considering the inclusion of international perspectives in their curricula, it remains clear that breadth and depth are currently lacking. Equally disconcerting is the rather shallow range of co-curricular options offered to students. Typically, these include international festivals, food events, international social hours, and some pairing of U.S. and international students for cultural and linguistic exchange. Yet another cause for concern is the lingering understanding of internationalization as simply an added avenue for creating a multicultural campus. As Milligan (2001) points out, multicultural components of a curriculum are frequently centered on notions of “inclusion” that fail to adequately address Martin’s (1992) problem of “curricular abundance” or the more pervasive and sinister lack of social capital among “out groups.” And finally, and perhaps for our purposes the most important area of concern, is the lack of understanding of the potential of global connections in the local communities. When combined, the lack of coordinated and structured curricular plans, the surface-level co-curricular activities that fail to invite serious consideration of different cultures, the insistence upon inclusive curricula at the expense of considered exploration of educational and social institutions that oppress, and the lack of a global-local connections creates a context in which engagement with global perspectives is hampered and remains largely superficial.

It is clear that the impact of current programs, whether curricular or co-curricular, is insufficient to bring about wholesale changes in the ways students approach and understand the global community. While meaningful to the few who are able to take advantage of them, all too often, these programs focus on recognition of differences instead of an in depth understanding the culturally-determined perspective and practices that add meaning and guidance to the lives of the “other.” Moreover, within these curricular and co-curricular activities, the notion of global is largely operationalized as being far from home, across seas, and beyond borders. Yet, in reality, many American cities are home to international populations and communities that are vibrant and which offer myriad of opportunities for cultural and curricular connections.

The purpose, in fact, of this paper, is to consider how global communities exist within the local and to share the experiences of the State University of New York – Buffalo State (Buffalo State) as it developed a new Global Engagement category within its Intellectual Foundations

program (General Education). Before going too far in this direction, however, let us first explore the ways in which the global and the local are both distinct and, more importantly from my perspective, convergent.

Globalization, Internationalization, and the Shift toward the Local

The world has never been either flat or disconnected. Throughout history, peoples interacted in ways that brought ideas, cultures, and languages into contact. However, with the rise of the modern nation-state, invisible, yet firm boundaries began to separate people into distinct categories. As the walls of the nations were built, they often served as cloaks of invisibility that shrouded cultures and people in mystery and darkness, ultimately resulting in a narrowing of attitudes toward and about the “other.” Education, while ostensibly bent on discovery, also played a role in framing learning and worldviews on a few narrowly defined interactions. Indeed, although universities rapidly expanded, whether in the *Age of Reason* or more recently, Samoff (1999) argues that the educational landscape has been flattened. Indeed, regardless of the local context (i.e., African, Asian, Australian, European, North and South American, etc.), institutional policies, favored pedagogies, faculty preparation, and administrative structures all look and feel remarkably similar. More importantly, Samoff (1999) contends that institutions of higher learning are largely colonial, insisting on the “implantation” of certain values at the exclusion of others. The convergence of educational structures, namely universities, around a common conceptualization resulted in the potential to claim, proclaim, and sequester knowledge into appropriate and sterile categories.

It is precisely the question of knowledge control, or perhaps the corresponding ability to provide descriptors of events that is evoked when one brings up the distinction between “global” and “local.” As Guy (2009) suggests, the difference between the global and the local is largely determined by social constructs that are aligned with Luhmann’s (1990) concept of self-description. Indeed, insofar as Luhman (1990) suggests that environments are self-referential systems that can only be defined, or can only define themselves, by the knowledge they possess, the importance of the “other” remains outside realms of cognitive potential for those who inhabit closed systems. While Luhmann (1990) seems to acknowledge some possibilities for displacement of boundaries and perceptions, these realignments of systems can only occur from

forces housed within the environment. That is to say that change can only occur from within and that contiguous relationship matter little.

On its own account, the positions that Luhmann (1990) and perhaps Guy (2009) take depend on the separation, whether through questions of space, values, or self-description, of the global and local. In slightly modifying Robertson's (1992) historical approach to global – local distinction, we find a new historical phase in which the global has become the local. Indeed, in lieu of a highly idealized and rigid line of distinction between the global and the local, long a part of the historical conversations in the field, the seemingly impermeable boundaries that Luhmann (1990) imagined have been pierced by new phases of immigration and settlement patterns that challenge and indeed disrupt historical concepts. Following Gupta (1995), I suggest that identifying the “other” only in terms spatial proximity, or contingency relationships, ignores the ways in which borders are formed, deformed, and eventually reformed in a discursive socio-political act. By taking a more multi-scalar approach to the lived connections between individuals, we can construct a complex and deeply contoured spatial model that draws connections instead of imposing spurious divisions. In addition to problems related to supposed spatial separation, I also recognize that relationships formed between the global in the local are not informed by interactions that are largely unintentional and contingency based, but rather by what Boyles (2012) and Callejo, Breault, and White (in press) have called “transactional.” Within this construct, individuals insert themselves into a community, see themselves a part of the environment, and create harmony where discord was once possible. Change occurs from within - from the internal and ecological relationships that shape and are shaped by transactional experiences with the other within communities that have long grown past isolated islands of single cultures.

Extrapolating somewhat from Huebner (1975), communities, within the framework of the global-local, shake off the half-hidden space they inhabit and delve into the clouds of uncertainty that host multiplicities of shared and negotiated meaning. This is certainly reminiscent of both Deweyan (1938) and Freirean (1970) concepts of the emergence of social ecologies that support individual and community growth. As Boyles (2012) noted, these new fully ecological senses of self within a much larger community, the global-local, affords the possibility of transactions encounters with the “other” that are informed by Dewey's (1938) insistence that the systems that support life and meaning extend beyond the imagined boundaries of current and sheltered

existence. This indeed, calls educators to rethink the boundaries that separate the local and the global in curriculum.

The dismantling of the global-local divide promises the space to reconsider and to reimagine the ways in which universities can act upon their heretofore quixotic quest for campus internationalization. In what follows, I will discuss the experiences of one mid-sized comprehensive college in the State University of New York (SUNY) system. As SUNY's only urban comprehensive institution, Buffalo State was able to consider the ways in which the community could serve as a curricular canvas. In so doing, the institution rethought its curriculum and created an Intellectual Foundations (General Education) program that supported global engagement at the local as well as international level. I begin the story of Buffalo State's success by setting the context and then follow with an in depth review of the College's response to the question of the global in the local.

The Local and Regional Context

Overall, the population of the United States has changed dramatically over the past 50 years. Increasingly from just over 152 million in 1950 to roughly 313 million today, the population has not only more than doubled, it has also become increasingly diverse – a reflection of the major influence that immigration has had over the past 50 years (Shrestha & Heisler, 2011). Further, neither trend is expected to slow over the next 40 years. As *Table 1. US Population Projections* suggests, the percentage of the U. S. population made up of individuals who self-declare as white will decrease from 67% to just under 50% by 2050. At the same time, foreign born, Hispanic, and Asian populations will increase. Only the percentage of blacks will remain relatively stable at 13%. Like the rest of the nation, faces in the State of New York (see *Figure 1. New York State*) are changing as well. Today, the state's population is slightly over 19 million, ranking only behind California and Texas in the number of inhabitants. While the number of individuals that call the state home is impressive, a more nuanced look at the state's population reveals a tale of two vastly different areas – one called upstate and the other downstate. From New York City in the east to Jamestown in the west and from Plattsburgh in the north to the southern cities of Binghamton and Monticello, New York state residents often argue vociferously among themselves about the exact border of the upstate-downstate divide. Some split counties. Others isolate New York City and Long Island. Still others talk of population

density. There is, in fact, lots of discussion but little agreement. Yet, any statistical analysis requires stable definitions of these areas. As such, in most instances, researchers (Denton, Friedman, & D'Anna, 2011) define upstate as all the counties north of New York City and its immediate neighbors (see *Figure 2. Upstate New York*). Downstate, on the other hand, contains the remaining counties (see *Figure 3. Downstate New York*). To clarify a bit, this means that of the 62 total counties found in the state, 52 are upstate counties while the remaining 10 are downstate. Yet, the significant difference in the allotment of counties between the areas belies information on population distribution and density. While home to only 16% of the state's counties, the downstate area has 64% of the state's population (Denton, Friedman, & D'Anna, 2011).

With regard to the distribution of the population along ethnic and racial lines, New York State is slightly more diverse than the remainder of the United States. Whereas the overall percentage of whites in the United State stands at about 67%, in New York, this number drops to about 58% (see *Table 2. New York State Population/Ethnic Distribution 2010*). There are also larger percentages of Hispanics/Latinos in New York State than in the nation (18.2% / 16.9%), Blacks (17.5% / 13.1%), and Asians (8.0% / 5.1%). Only in the percentage of American Indians (1.0% / 1.2%) and Native Hawaiians (2.2% / 2.4%) did New York fall below national averages (US Census Bureau, 2010).

A closer look at the state reveals, once again, significant differences between the upstate and downstate areas. As a major immigrant gateway into the United States, New York City is culturally, linguistically, racially, and ethnically diverse. While the upstate area has increased diversity within its population since 1990, it remains largely white (see *Table 3. Upstate New York State Population/Ethnic Distribution 1990, 2000, 2010*). Perhaps only Buffalo and a handful of other upstate cities, such as Rochester and Syracuse, stand against the overall population distribution (US Census Bureau, 2010). Indeed, of the 259,000 residents in Buffalo, only 45% self-identify as "white alone" on census forms. Almost 40% self-identify as black while 10.5% self-identify as Hispanic.

Buffalo is also an anomaly in other important ways. Within the two-county statistical area (Erie and Niagara), the total 2012 population remained fairly stable at slightly over 1.1 million. However, the stability in population was largely the result of strong international in- migration. While more than 6,000 residents left the area, more than 5,300 international immigrants arrived

in 2012. Importantly, and again unlike other areas in the state, Buffalo saw more important gains in Asian immigration than other areas. While the Asian population remains fairly low, at about 3.2%, it increased by slightly over 80% from 2010 to 2012, more than double the percentage increase of Hispanics (39%). In part, the statistical rise in Asian immigrant was the result of a strong influx of Burmese refugees. In 2005, more than 2,500 Karen refugees landed in Buffalo – a number that has been relatively stable over the past 9 years (World Report on Immigration 2010, 2010).

Buffalo, with its rich mix of races, ethnic groups, and nationalities represents, in truth, the quintessential cosmopolitan community. This is not to say that the city is overly large or that it has towering skyscrapers. Rather, Buffalo is cosmopolitan in the philosophical sense of being one with the world, the cosmos (Nussbaum, 1997). While the ancient Stoics labeled this relationship cosmopolitan, within the curriculum, I have chosen the term the global-local. Yet, whether curricularists use cosmopolitan or some other term, it is clear that a primary role of education, as noted in the introduction, is to assist learners as they grapple with the complexities of the world, their own identities, and the ways in which they relate to others. In the next section, I will explore Buffalo State response to its relationship with its West Side neighbors and the responsibility of institutions of higher learning to bridge the chasms that separate the global from the local.

Buffalo State’s Response - A New Intellectual Foundations Category

The College is well-situated, both in regard to its location in Buffalo’s West Side, a thriving multicultural community nestled within the larger cityscape, as well as its understanding of its mission to engage the campus and community in discussions about the role and purpose of global education in higher learning. Indeed, throughout its Strategic Plan, Buffalo State recognizes the central role that global engagement plays in preparing students for the challenges of the future. In stating, in the first lines of its Vision Statement, that the College “serves to improve our region, our nation, and our world, one student at a time,” the institution makes a commitment to providing the breadth and depth of educational experiences, whether within or outside the traditional classroom, that opens students’ eyes to questions of identity, social contract, and the sociolinguistic phenomena that inform an understanding of the distinctive features of world cultures. While expanding understanding of “otherness” is a worthy goal for

institutions of higher education, it is particularly important in the local context. Buffalo's growing immigrant population challenges existing social and educational institutions to provide exemplary services for non-traditional communities. As an institution of higher education preparing future leaders, Buffalo State had the responsibility to provide programming that helps students fulfill their potential as leaders.

When offered the opportunity by the State University of New York (SUNY) to revisit its general education program, the College undertook a long and diligent analysis of its existing program – called Intellectual Foundations (IF). While the overall mandate from the SUNY central was to reduce and simplify general education programs, the Buffalo State also sought to strengthen programming by reinforcing some areas and eliminating duplication in others. As discussions and conversation unfolded, one essential question, raised over and over, was the ways in which the College's curriculum reinforced areas of the Strategic Plan and more specifically calls for increased understanding of global challenges. Traditionally, institutions of higher education have conceptualized global engagement as a series of single-subject foreign language classes that range from 3 to 14 credit hours. Yet, even with significant study of French, Spanish, German, Mandarin, Swahili, or any number of other languages, American college students remain, in the words of former Senator Paul Simon (1980), "tongue tied."

Concomitant with being "tongue tied," American students also suffer from a "mind bind" that is, in short, the inability to consider the multiple perspectives inherent in cultural diversity. Indeed, as research suggests (Cook, 2013; Warford & White, 2012; & Magnan, 2008), foreign language classes often fail to address cultural content due to an overemphasis on the study of grammar and the reality that while the linguistics (language) sometimes change within the classroom, cultural content more often than not reflects American perspectives and practices. When it does venture further afield, content is often limited to "Culture Fridays" where faces, festivals, foods, and folklore dominate.

When coupled, the lack of successful language acquisition and the inability to infuse meaningful culture into the foreign language classroom and the College's IF curriculum set the stage for conversations about the meaning of being globally engaged and the ways in which curriculum can foster expansive understandings of self and other. Over time, the College settled on the concept of "Global Engagement" with an understanding that there are multiple paths to intercultural competencies. As *Figure 4. Global Engagement Outline* demonstrates, there are

traditional and nontraditional means of satisfying this IF category. This was done in an effort to ensure that students have a variety of means of engaging the curricula and ensuring ultimate success. Moreover, Buffalo State's Global Engagement requirement speaks directly to the College's commitment to excellence and to the institution's goal of preparing students to meet the complexities of an ever-changing world. Specifically, each option, whether focused on communicative competencies couched within sociocultural parameters or informed by an understanding of the importance of the distinctive features of cultures associated with foreign languages, assists students in the appropriation of the skills required for reflective engagement in an increasingly interconnected world.

Overall, Option 1: Study a Foreign Language and Option 3: Study Abroad, met little resistance from faculty and staff because, in many ways, they resemble conventional avenues of satisfying foreign language and global engagement requirements. What did require some negotiation was whether study abroad in an English-speaking setting would count toward the Global Engagement category. Given that the college had already opted to use the American Association of Colleges and Universities' (AACU) Intercultural Knowledge and Competence Value Rubric (see <http://www.aacu.org/value/rubrics/pdf/InterculturalKnowledge.pdf> for additional information) for assessment within the Global Engagement category, proponents of allowing all study abroad opportunities noted that the rubric does not mention language. Rather, the focus of the rubric and by extension the Global Engagement category is on intercultural competence defined as "a set of cognitive, affective, and behavioral skills and characteristics that support effective and appropriate interaction in a variety of cultural contexts" (Bennett, 2008, p. 96). With this in mind, faculty and staff determined that study abroad, regardless of setting, satisfied this requirement and should be counted within the category.

Option 2, passing a recognized language proficiency exam at an approved level, produced significant debate especially with regard to the required level of proficiency. While many would like to believe that two semesters of college-level language study would produce reasonably competent foreign language speakers, the reality is that in most cases, survival skills are more in line with reasonable expectations. For this reason, the Novice-high level of the ACTFL Proficiency Exam was chosen as the appropriate level of proficiency. As an aside, these conversations necessitated that the foreign language department reconsider curricula with an eye toward the American Council on the Teaching of Foreign Language's proficiency scale. While

there perhaps should not be a true one-to-one correspondence between the ACTFL Standards and college foreign language curricula, there are nonetheless, as Liskin-Gasparro (1984) noted some years ago, interesting parallels and promising areas of discussion and curricular growth.

While each of the three options mentioned above received some degree of attention, the “Global at Home and Abroad” was by far the most widely discussed of the four options. While reactions varied from total support to questions about how the global is present in the local, this choice was informed by the College’s underlying commitment to the changing landscape of American cities and the understanding that emerging, not static, notions of global are required to prepare all citizens for the challenges of today’s increasingly complex world. Indeed, individualized and class-oriented “global at home and abroad” experiences are foregrounded in questions of identity, interconnections, responsibility, and the realities of American diversity. Experiences in the global at home category are informed by the College’s mission to be locally engaged and the realities of the ever-increasing diversity found in Western New York. Inherent in new conceptualization of self within society includes an understanding of how other cultures interpret U.S. values, an understanding of how American citizens interprets the values of other countries and societies, an understanding of how choices affect or influence other societies and countries, and an understanding of how consumption impacts the world (Hovland, 2009).

Further, in 2006, the Association of American Colleges and Universities (AAC&U) commissioned a study to determine employer perception of graduates’ preparedness for work. Over 70% of respondents suggested that recent graduates were not adequately prepared for global issues, including the challenges and opportunities associated with global at home communities (*College Learning for a New Century: A Report from the National Leadership Council for Liberal Education and American Promise, 2007*). The data reconfirm the need for focused attention on the connections between education and the dynamically shifting work and civic environments.

Overall, this new Intellectual Foundations category speaks to (1) the changing ways in which the global is increasingly local as well as (2) the means to offer serious academic work that is connected to and engaged with the community. Moreover, it recognizes that many, if not most, of Buffalo State’s student population is relatively place-bound, lacking the time or resources to study abroad even for short periods of time. In time, the program will be assessed, re-organized, and improved. Yet, in the short-term, the College demonstrated a clear vision of

increasing intercultural competencies among its student body as well as a unbreakable connection to the communities that surround the campus.

Conclusion

As Hovland (2009) notes, an AAC&U report in 2007 suggested that relatively few employers believe that recent college and university graduates possessed the global knowledge necessary for advancement (AAC&U, 2007). Given this unfortunate situation, institutions of higher education are increasingly seeking an intentional alignment of curricula with mission and context that move students beyond the acquisition of facts and figures in isolation. By connecting the capacity for civic engagement with the need to support and sustain domestic diversity, institutions such as Buffalo State and Whittier College in Los Angeles have answered the call to design programs that provide a sense of global connections within the local context. While much of this work is accomplished in general education programs, the need to expand the global connections within the local and to promote them through more expansive curricular innovations has been noted by AAC&U and has led to a more vertical integration, at some institutions, of global themes beyond the first year experience.

While these spiraled curricula and the ways in the local global is found within them is certainly interesting, the goal of this paper was to consider the ways in which the general education curricula, locally known as Intellectual Foundations, reimagined the ways in which the institution and students encounter increased globalization. As the College moved from an insistence on the study of a foreign language to an understanding of engagement as a broader form of connections to others, it embraced myriad discussions and ideas that brought about a better awareness of the importance and place of the global within the local environment.

Although I drew attention to the importance of demographic changes, both within the State of New York and the Upstate area, which created the opportunities for bringing the global to the local, it would be a mistake, I am sure, to believe in an inevitable march toward engaging the global within the local. It took, in my view, a concerted effort to bring Buffalo State to an embrace of the potential curricular and individual benefits of moving beyond traditional modes of “studying the other” from afar to an approach that engages students within their own communities and which makes connections in meaningful and promising ways.

Tables and Figures

Table 1. US Population Projections

	2010	2050
Total Population (in millions)	313	438
Share of Totals (by percentage)		
Foreign Born	12%	19%
White	67%	47%
Hispanic	14%	29%
Black	13%	13%
Asian	5%	9%

Adapted from the Pew Research Center's 2008 Report on US population growth and distribution.

Table 2. New York State Population/Ethnic Distribution 2010 (in percentages)

	2010
Non-Hispanic White	58%
Non-Hispanic Black	17.5%
Native American	1.0%
Asian	8.0%
Hispanic	18.2%

Adapted U.S. Census Bureau, 2010.

Table 3. Upstate New York State Population/Ethnic Distribution 1990, 2000, 2010 (in percentages)

	1990	2000	2010
Non-Hispanic White	90.4%	86.4%	82.8%
Non-Hispanic Black	5.9%	6.4%	7.4%
Native American	.4%	4%	4%
Asian	1.1%	1.5%	2.2%
Hispanic	2.2%	3.5%	5.3%

Adapted from *How the Other Third Lives: A Focus on Upstate New York* (Denton, Friedman, & D'Anna, 2011).

Figure 1. New York State

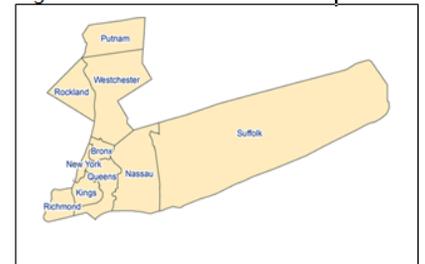


Figure 2. Upstate New York



(Denton, Friedman, & D'Anna, 2011)

Figure 3. Downstate New York



(Denton, Friedman, & D'Anna, 2011)

Figure 4. Global Engagement Outline

**Global Engagement (0-6 Credits)
Quick Guide**

Students are to select from the four options to satisfy the global engagement requirement:

Option 1: Study a Foreign Language	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Take and pass a college language course at the 102 level. • Demonstration of successful completion of two sequential foreign language study (the same language) at the high school level will satisfy the Global Engagement requirement • This option meets the SUNY General Education requirement • Contact the Modern and Classical Language Department at [redacted] for information about the CLEP exam
Option 2: Proficiency Exam	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Pass an Oral Proficiency Interview (OPI) at the novice-high level • Contact the Assistant Dean of International and Exchange Program at [redacted]
Option 3: Study Abroad	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Take an approved faculty-led study abroad, global engagement course OR • Contact the Assistant Dean of Intellectual Foundations at [redacted] and Instructor of Record for an Independent Study Abroad experience • Passing will satisfy 3 of 6 required credits for global engagement
Option 4: Global at Home and Abroad	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Take an approved service-learning, global engagement course OR • Contact the Assistant Dean of Intellectual Foundations at [redacted] and the Volunteer and Service Learning Coordinator at [redacted] for an independent local, regional or international experience with an organization • Passing will satisfy 3 of 6 required credits for global engagement

Implementation Guidelines:

- A student with one year of prior foreign language study from high school and who has met placement criteria where needed can satisfy the Global Engagement requirement by choosing from options 1-4.
- A student with no prior foreign study from high school can satisfy the Global Engagement requirement through Option 2 or a combination of Option 1, 3 and/or 4 for a total of six credits.

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